A Contrastive Analysis Study of Condolences between English and Arabic

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Abstract

Language is the essential signaling system used as communicative acts to achieve goals or purposes. Therefore, the influential power of words cannot be ignored or even underestimated. Acknowledgements and expressives are the most frequently speech acts used by human beings in various situations and occasions. Accordingly, in times of afflictions or bereavements, language must manipulate these two speech acts to express sympathy, regret, support and encouragement. Condolence utterances are the tools for achieving these acts. Death is the most difficult time people experience, therefore, condolences present sympathetic comfort and in turn help to weaken the burden and strengthen the bereaved. The afflictions or bereavements are inevitably occurred; therefore, the concept of condolence is universal, i.e., common in all cultures. The present study is an attempt to conduct a contrastive analysis of condolence expressions in English and Arabic. To achieve this, aim a linguistic presentation to the concept of condolences is made. The study gives a brief description of the semantic and syntactic realizations of condolence expressions in each language separately. The variability of patterns with regard to context is to be accounted for in addition to the pragmatic and social functions of this formula. Then, the descriptions of both languages are compared and paralleled to specify the similarities and differences between these two languages.

Keywords: Condolences, Glorious Quran, Semantic formula, Analysis Study; languages; Contrastive

1. Introduction

Condolences are one of the communicative speech acts that are used in occasions of affliction and bereavement for three purposes: sharing the sorrow of the bereaved by expressing sympathy and regret, giving support and encouragement, and assuring the temporality of life. Accordingly, the bereaved feels comfortable to hear these verbal expressions from others. Condolences are formal expressions of sympathy, regret or sorrow to someone who is experiencing pain arising from death, deep mental anguish, or misfortune (Broomberg, 2000: 337and Smith,2003: 1). Also, they are acts of active, conscious support and encouragement in the face of adversity. They reduce the pain of those affected (Mwihaki, 2004: 3). The emotion behind these expressions is often more important than the wording itself.

In another occasions, condolences may be used for sarcasm as if one considers the complaining person to be exaggerating their suffering, especially when they appear to consider as tragic something that is relatively insignificant. Condolences can also be used to

acknowledge a fellow feeling or even a common opinion (Yahya, 2009: 52). In addition to the verbal condolences there are the non-verbal condolences such as the donation of money, preparation meals and taking care of the bereaved person or family. Non-verbal condolences are considered as moral and material duty should be carried out to support the bereaved in this difficult time (ibid).

Hayajneh (2009: 6) and Yahya (2009: 53) state that in certain communicative areas such as condolences, language and culture cannot be separated. For example, in constructing condolences, the religious, conventional, and traditional beliefs of the bereaved should be taken into account in certain societies. This conscious consideration is to avoid faults and embarrassment. Sincere condolences are highly appreciated by the bereaved and any mistaking in choosing appropriate expressions of condolences may psychological hurt her/him and lead to weakening or even ending social relationships between the condoler and condoled (Smith, 2003: 1 and Zunin and Zunin,2007; Bertini, 2020). Muihaki (2004: 133) states that semantically condolences have a social meaning referring to the use of language in establishing and regulating social relations and maintaining social roles. Accordingly, condolences have phatic communion achieved through ritualistic use of language (Crystal,2003; Ceglie, 2020).

2. Condolences in English

The origin of the word ' condolence ' is Latin. It consists of ' *con-*', meaning *with* or *together*, and 'dolore' which means *sorrow* or *to grieve* (Zunin and Zunin, 2007; Jeffrey, 2021). The use of the word "condolences", in plural, is more common than "condolence".

2. 2 Categories of Condolences

Smith (2003: 1) proposes the following categories of condolences:

A. Classical stock condolences are neutral expressions which are appropriate for almost everyone, every religion, every culture and every bad occasion, such as:

[1] My thoughts are with you.
[2] Please accept our deepest sympathy.
[3] Sorry (for your loss).

B. Condolences considering someone's religious beliefs are constructed in regard to people religious beliefs. Believing in a concept of heaven and hell requires condolence expressions that express expressions or invocations for the deceased to be comfortable and in good-peaceful condition or place in heaven, such as:

[4] May God comfort you.
[5] May his / her soul find peace.

C. Condolences as quotes are extracts from poetry or literary works which are vivid condolences representations because of their artistic, effective and deep meaningful language. They are wonderful manifestations of comfort and sympathy. People use popular quotes concerning death and mourning, such as:

[6] " To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die."
[7] " Like a bird singing in the rain, let grateful memories survive in times of sorrow. "

D. Condolences containing the condition of the deceased are used as a kind of comfort for the bereaved. For example, a person who was suffering from serious or chronic disease

before death, it is appropriate to refer to the end of the suffering, such as:

[8] I was sorry to learn of your mother's death, but I am glad to hear that her suffering has come to an end.

2.3 Semantic Formulas of Condolences

Elwood (2004:253-4) proposes the following prevalent semantic formulas of condolence expressions based on Olshtain and Cohen's (1983 cited in Elwood, ibid)**:**

Acknowledgement of death category includes certain interjection such as: *'Oh, Ah, Oh/ Ah my God'*. These interjections reflect information such as something bad or unexpected is happening or happened. Non-verbal responses may accompany these interjections in the bereavement occasions (Wierzbicka, 1986 cited in Yahya ,2009: 57).

2. Expression of sympathy is the base of the speech act, such as:
[9] I am sorry.
[10] No, that is very unfortunate.
[11] My heart is with you.
[12] I swear, it grieves us a lot.

These expressions rely mainly on the variables of education and sex. For example, men tend to use [9] more frequently, while females generally use words of strong emotion as [10], [11], and [12] (Yahya,2009: 58).

3. Offer of Assistance refers to any attempts to lessen the condolee's burden, such as:
[13] Is there anything I can do. (General offer)
[14] Tell me how I can help you. (General offer)
[15] I am ready to record all lectures. Do not worry. (Specific offer)

4**.** Future – Oriented Remarks usually take the form of words of encouragement or practical advice in imperative forms, such as:
[16] Do something for a change.
[17] Try to visit a close friend.

5. Expression of concern relates to "showing care for the well-being of the speaker" or the family, such as:

[18] Take care of your kids.
[19] Focus on your work.

Elwood (ibid:261) gives reference to other peripheral formulas such as:

a) An expression of Empathy which includes statements, such as:
[20] I know how it feels to lose someone close.
b) Showing similar experience, such as:
[21] There is no need to speak, we have experienced the same.
c) Statements of not knowing. Sometimes respondents mention explicitly that
[22] They hadn't known about the death.
d) Statements of lacking words. We have observed that respondents sometimes suffer from lacking appropriate words for the occasion, saying things like:
[23] I don't know what to say.
e) Related Questions. These are very frequent in that respondents inquire about the funeral or way of the death, such as:
[24] Was the deceased sick?
f) Related Comments. These include comments such as:
[25] It is impossible to know what the bereaved feels.

[26] The deceased's parent must be even sadder than his sons.

 g) Expression of surprise, such as:

[27] Are you serious?!

 h) Non-verbal reactions. These are denoting money, making meals, etc. These are less frequent condolences especially in Western cultures.

2.5 Types of Condolences

 Packer (1946:9), Austin (1962: 159) and Bach and Harnish (1979: 52) classify condolences expressions into the following two types:

 1. *Explicit condolences* are utterances containing either performative verb such as *'condole, grieve and commiserate'*. The adverb-performative marker 'hereby' can be used in these condolences (Cruse, 2006: 126), as in:

[28] I hereby condole with you.

 Or nouns such as *'condolence, grievances, commiseration'* that are derived from these performative verbs, as in:

[29] My condolences.

[30] We send our commiseration to you and to your family.

 Searle and Vanderveken (1985: 212) prefer the use of the utterance [29] instead of [28] because they consider the verb "condole " out of date.

 2. Implicit condolences have no one of the above condoling verbs or derived nouns, such as ("Quick Condolence", 2013: 1 and Jadhav, 2013: 1)

[31] Oh, I am so sorry.

[32] May you find comfort in loving memories.

[33] You have my sincere sympathy.

[34] He will always live in our hearts.

 Elwood (2004: 61) observed that the most popular condoling expression among the American individuals is "I *am sorry*".

2.6 The Syntactic Constructions of Condolences

 Syntactically different constructions can realize condolences. These constructions are the following (Condolence Phrases, 2013: 1 and Ropchan, 2013:1):

 1. Declarative sentences: In these condolences the subject is present and the sentence usually in the simple present and indicative active, as in:

[35] You have our deepest sympathy.

[36] Words fall short of expressing my sorrow for your loss.

 2. Imperative sentences: The subject in these condolences is absent so the verb begins the sentence. To lessen the impolite sense of these condolences, the word '*please*' can be used before the verbs, as in:

[37] Please accept my / our condolences.

[38] Remember that I am ready to do anything you want.

 3. Irregular (or fragmentary) sentences: These condolences syntactically suffer from the lack of obligatory elements like verbs and subjects (Quirk et al., 1985: 883), as in:

[39] Sorry about your brother. (= I am sorry about your brother.)

[40] Always in our hearts. (= He is always in our hearts.)

 A subtype of irregular sentences that can express condolences is the formulaic

sentences which have the archaic formula of "may + subject + predication ", such as:

[41] May your strength prevail to help you through this difficult time.
[42] May the love of God embrace you in these tough moments.

3. Condolence Expression in Arabic

The noun *condolence*s ((التعازي is derived from the verb *condole* "عزا". In Arabic culture, death is considered the most difficult and sever trouble that human beings face so that condolences have a noticeable role in communication. Condolences expose very noble human values of exchanging feelings and human sympathy. According to the participants involved in the condoling act, there are three forms of condolences:

i)   Condolences that are made by the speaker (condoler) and directed to the bereaved. This form is the most common one in actual use.
ii)   Condolences stated by and directed to the bereaved himself. This form is less prevalence than the first form.
iii)   Condolences produced by the condoler /speaker and directed to the deceased before or after burying.

3.1 The characteristics of condolences language in Arabic

العموش (2010: 551) and El Shahawi (2011:np) explain the main characteristics of the language of condolences in Arabic into the following points:

1.   Condolences language is strong and direct to create a deep influence on the addressee's soul and mind. This is because the bereaved, after the loss of a beloved, may be absent minded and unconscious so there is a need to call him back to his conscious and psychological balanced state. The strong senses implied in imperatives and negatives are used mainly for this purpose.
2.   The condolence expressions are various in length. They are mostly short, and few are long used for specific persons or occasions.
3.   In the traditional written condolences, the identity of the condoler is intentionally hidden to focus on the message rather than the senders' identity.
4.   The purposes of condolences are either condoling or comforting the bereaved. Also, they provoke spiritual assistance and support. They encourage the bereaved to pass this difficult experience.
5.   The main theme of the condolences is patience and satisfaction with Allah's judgment, acceptance gratefully fate and destiny, declaration of good and noble features and deeds of the deceased, invoking Allah to grant the deceased mercy and blessing, and lessening the burden of the trouble on the bereaved.

3.2 Syntactic structures of condolences

Condolence letters are mostly started with one of the following syntactic structures (العموش, 2010: 589-91)

1.   Imperative verbs such as (fear أتق, learn اعلم,consider,اعتبر be aware, etc), such as:
        (43)اتق الله واسترجع.Fear Allah and say we belong to Allah and to.
him we return.
Learn that the creatures all belong to the Creator. (44)أعلم إن الخلق للخالق.
2.   Nouns derived from the verbs.
You have to fear Allah and be patient. (45)عليك بتقوى الله و الصبر.

3. Negatives: It is semantically like imperatives because there is an order to stop doing something, such as:

Do not grieve for him. He is a martyr. ... (لا تجزع عليه، فقد قتل شهيد) 46

4. Supplications or invocations. Usually, verbs in these constructions are in the comparative form because the addresser supplicates Allah to intensify the reward of being patient and satisfied with Allah's matter.

(47) أعظم /عظم الله أجركم وألهمكم الصبر.

- May God increase your reward and grand your patience.

5. Conditional clauses with negative but not conditional meaning.

(48) أمعن بالجزع فأنت أولى الناس به إن حدث أن رد الجزع أحداً إلى أهله"

Consider the grief you are the best qualified of it if it, the grief, has returned any one to his family.

3.3 Categories of Condolences in Arabic

In time of bereavement, Arabs use condolence expressions mainly taken from three sources: Glorious Qur'an, Prophetic Hadith, poetry or prose. This categorization can be explained according to the following:

1- *pre-Islamic period*: Stetkevych (1993:163) and relates the condolences of the pre-Islamic period to the genre of lamentation (Rithā', رثاء) which was made mainly in the form of poetry or classic prose. The genre was used by both pre-Islamic male and female poets. The subjects of the lamentation are the invariably dead male warriors and lords. Condolences even if they are famous quotes from poetry or prose are rare. El Shahawi (2011:60) states that "lamentation in fact is crying over the dead and bemoaning its separation, and among its most important goals are antiques." Therefore, lamentation is different from condolences which involve "underestimating the affliction and alleviating the affliction and inviting him to overcome it with patience and solace" (ibid).

2. *post-Islamic period*: Condolences of the post-Islamic period are affected to a great extent by the Islamic beliefs and conventions. The belief in fate which is planned by Allah's will only is predominant one. This is expected to be revealed by the extensive use of religious words and phrases (Yahia, 2009: 54). Therefore, the selection of an appropriate condolence is based on religion. Islam provides classic stock of condolences which are respectively observed by the Muslims (Behnam et al. 2013:1689). Condolences that are taken from the classic stock condolences are provided by Holy Qur'an which is Allah's great miracle in Islamic religion. The Qu'ran is Allah's words revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Accordingly, Allah's condolences to His prophet and believers are the truest, most effective and sincere ones. Muslims have observed these precious condoling expressions and used them in all afflictions.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) narrated a great reward for those who condole the bereaved in the time of affliction. He said: "Whosoever consoles a person afflicted with grief receives his selfsame reward." (Al-Tirmidhi and ibn Majah). Here are some examples of classic stock condolences divided according to their resources:

A. Condolences from Holy Qur'an, such as:

(49) قال الله تعالى: (إِنَّا لِلَّـهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ).[سورة البقرة ، أية 156]

"To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return"(Yusuf Ali, 2001 :63)

(50) قال الله تعالى: (كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذائِقَةُ المَوتِ وَنَبلوكُم بِالشَّرِّ وَالخَيرِ فِتنَةً وَإِلَينا تُرجَعونَ) [سورة الأنبياء، أية 35]

"Every soul shall have a taste of death: and We test you by evil and by good by way of trial. to Us must ye return."(Yusuf, 2001: 802)

The above Qur'anic verses explain the inevitability of death. This indicates to Elwood's (2004:64) the semantic formulas of sharing a similar experience, offers of assistance and future-oriented remarks. Death is inevitable experience shared by all human beings. Also, the inevitable return to Allah after an appointed period of time which is the mortal life a future-oriented remark which entails the illogical grief since the eventual meeting is with the lost beloved is predetermined in the presence of the Allah the most Merciful and most Compassionate (Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas).

B. Condolences from Prophetic Hadith (Prophet Muhammad's (PBUM) sayings). In these condolences Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) teaches Muslims to accept Allah's will and confess that everything is given and taken by the Possessor due to an appointed time. Therefore, people have to be satisfied with their fate and ask Allah to compensate them the best for their loss. Examples of condolences of this type are:

(51) اللَّهُمَّ آجِرْنِى فِى مُصِيبَتِى وَأَخْلِفْ لِى خَيرًا مِنْها

"O Allah! Reward me in my calamity and replace my loss with a better one."
(*Sahih* Muslim)

(52) إِنَّ لِلَّه مَا أَخَذَ وَلَهُ مَا أَعْطَى وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ عِنْدَهُ بِأَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى(صحيح البخاري وصحيح مسلم)

"Indeed! Whatever Allah gives or takes belongs to him and everything is predestined by Him" Sahih Bukhari &Sahih Muslim

C. Condolences as quotes, such as:

(53) وما فقد الماضون مثل محمد ولا مثله حتى القيامة يُفقدُ

The above poetic condolence was written by the poet of Islam Hassan bin Thabit who laments the deceased of Allah's Messenger Muhammad (PBUH). He said that all the past people had not lost anyone like Muhammad nor like him until resurrection is or will be lost (El Shahawi, 2011:62)

(54) يا أبتاه جنة الفردوس مأواه   يا أبتاه أجاب رباً دعاه

This wonderful poetic condolence was said by Fatima Al-zahra (PUH), the daughter of Allah's Messenger Muhammad (PBUH), when her father died. She condoled in pain and sorrow herself and other Muslims women saying that Paradise is her Father's abode after He answered His Lord's (Allah) call (ibid).

(55) اصبر لكل مصيبة وتجلّد واعلم بأن المرء غير مخلّد.

In the above poetic verse, the poet uses imperative construction (be patient and strong in every affliction) to condole the bereaved. He uses another imperative construction to explain the reason behind his demand. He asks the bereaved to learn that no person is immortal (Islamic Condolences).

D. Condolences considering someone's religious beliefs: As mentioned above that the Islamic culture has a great effect on Muslims' beliefs and attitudes towards death and other misfortunes. This effect is obvious in the majority of condolences that do not belong to the three sources above. Condolences of this type are mostly supplication for the decease to be mercified and blessed by Allah and for the bereaved to be patient, gratitude, and strong during this most difficult time. Also, the condolences may express or contain the condition of the deceased. Here are some examples of condolences that express generally Muslims' viewpoints of death, the immortality of Allah - the great Creator-and mortality of all creatures (Yahia, 2010: 61-3):

(56) الله يلهمكم الصبر في مصابكم و يأجركم الخير في الدنيا والآخرة.

May Allah grant you and your family patience in this difficult time and reward you with good both in this world and the next.

(57)يجعل الله مثواه جنة ويغفر ذنوبه ويوسع وينير قبره.

May Allah grant him Paradise and forgive his sins. May He make his grave a place of comfort and light.

(58)البقاء والدوام لله. Immortality is for Allah only.

(59)هذا ما قدر الله This was decreed by Allah.

(60) رحمة الله عليه Let the mercy of Allah be upon him

E. General Condolences. In this type of condolences there is no consideration to the religious beliefs nor references to the condition of the deceased. They are general –formal condolences used by everyone. Elwood (2004:262) and Yahia (2010: 54) notice that this type of condolences is used rarely in Arabic cultures. The majority of the English condolences mentioned above can be used to fulfill the purposed achieved by these condolences. Examples of this type are the following:

(61)تقبل تعازينا الحارة والقلبية في هذا الوقت العصيب

Please accept our deepest and most heartfelt condolences at this most challenging time.

(62)أقدم لكم تعازي الحارة على هذا اليوم الحزين

I offer you my deepest condolences on this dark day.

4. Similarities

1. In both English and Arabic, condolences are expressive utterances that play an important communicative role in bereavement context in which people are weak and vulnerable. Generally, they express sympathy, comfort, support, and encouragement.
2. Syntactically, declarative sentences, imperatives, and formulaic utterances (May-invocations) are the most frequent constructions of condolences in both languages.
3. Condolences are categorized according to their sources and contents into classic stock condolences, those regarding the person's religious beliefs, condolences as quotes, and those reflecting the deceased's condition.
4. Usually condolences in these two languages reflect one or more semantic formulas suggested by Elwood's (2004). Accordingly, they can be used for multiple semantic purposes.

Contrast:
1. The main difference between English and Arabic is the great role of religion in providing people with condolence expressions. For Muslims, the main source of condolences is the Holy Qur'an. For example, Surah the Cow, verse 156(*To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return)* is the most frequent condolence expression used in Arabic. In English, no condolences have the semantic or prestigious status of this Qur'anic verse.
The second religious source of condolences is Prophet Hadith which expose the most wonderful and respected expressions such as (*Indeed! Whatever Allah gives or takes belongs to him and everything is predestined by Him*.) The Prophetic condolences are stated by The Messenger of Allah- Muhammad (PBUH) to teach the believers how to condole and comfort others in the bereavement occasions. Again, English lacks like these noble and comprehensive expressions. For example, (I am sorry) is the most plain and frequent condolence expression used in English.
2) Thematic content in English and Arabic differs completely. In English, condolences express

mainly sorrow and sympathy, while in Arabic and particularly Islamic culture the theme of patience is mostly prevalent. Acceptance Allah's fate in gratitude and looking for the good compensations for the loss in Hereafter are the other important themes. Therefore, Arabic reflects deeper and heavier semantic content than English.

3. Syntactically, Arabic is more explicit language than English because in Arabic there are more syntactic constructions such as negatives and conditions used to form condolences.

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